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SUBJECT: USAID/OFDA DIRECTOR VISITS ZIMBABWE TO ASSESS HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

REF: A) STATE 77761

B) Harare 593

11. (U) SUMMARY: USAID's Director of the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Ky Luu, visited Harare, Zimbabwe July 29-31, to consult with humanitarian organizations, United Nations (UN) agencies, donor representatives, and Zimbabwean citizens regarding the crisis in the country. The timing of his trip was particularly opportune, as Zimbabwe's humanitarian community has been operating under a restrictive and threatening environment in the post-March 29 election period. Luu's interactions and analysis led to a statement (see para 10 for complete text) released by USAID Administrator Fore calling on the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) to rescind its ban on NGO field activities and create conditions suitable for humanitarian organizations to resume work safely and constructively. Post is discussing a series of moves toward a strategic plan of action on the humanitarian situation. Complementary action by Washington is suggested in para 8. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) To inform his analysis of the humanitarian challenges with the context of the political situation, Luu first met with representatives from civil society and human rights organizations. These partners within USAID/Zimbabwe's Democracy and Governance (DG) portfolio provided Luu with evidence of intimidation, harassment, and threats to their personal and operational security during the post-election period. Particularly notable was the fearful environment and lack of engagement between humanitarian actors and those promoting human rights, as evidenced by the fact that no NGO was willing to be a signatory to a document produced by Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) that called the GOZ's June 4 suspension of NGOs a legal nullity.

13. (SBU) Luu met with USAID's Food for Peace (FFP) NGO partners, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), and the UN World Food Program (WFP), to discuss their operational environment and the country's food security situation, which were viewed to be both interrelated and distressing. The GOZ's sustained restriction of humanitarian access was highlighted as a dire concern, particularly with regard to this season's extremely poor agricultural yield and these agencies' inadequate access to beneficiaries as the "hungry season" approaches in October. The roundtable participants discussed approximate timeframes and deadlines by which beneficiary registration and distribution of agricultural inputs - both of which are currently prohibited - begin to lose their impact, also noting diminishing yield as crops are planted late in the season. Luu elicited participants' opinions of the UN's efficacy in-country, and received frank comments that expressed critical concerns regarding the effectiveness of the Humanitarian Coordinator as well as the UN

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in coordinating a response to the post-election crisis and advocating for humanitarian space.

14. (SBU) Post has articulated comparable concerns (REF B), issues which were also taken forward during Luu's July 14 meeting with John Holmes, the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator (REF A). In Harare, Luu met with Georges Tadonki, the head of the OCHA office in country. Though Tadonki was defensive and often blamed the inefficacy of his office on the Humanitarian Coordinator (who was out of country for the week), the prolonged postponement of protection standby capacity (ProCap) serves as an apt metaphor for his office's passive role in the coordination of humanitarian activities and continued engagement with the GOZ in a submissive manner. Scheduled to arrive the week of June 16, OCHA did not want to "provoke an incident" with the GOZ by deploying the officer. Particularly in light of the high number of internally displaced persons (IDPs, estimated at 30,000), the lack of monitoring presence in the rural areas where the security situation is largely unknown, and the absence of humanitarian space, USAID officers and Luu were extremely perplexed with this decision. Tadonki was not able to clearly articulate why the ProCap officer remained in Johannesburg when the UN Country Team (UNCT) had already approved his presence, nor was he able to describe his office's measurable strategies and progress towards humanitarian coordination and recommencement of access. Finally, Tadonki revealed that Holmes had recently offered to make another statement regarding humanitarian access, but that the OCHA/Zimbabwe office believed it would compromise negotiations with the GOZ.

15. (SBU) Luu's meetings with UNHCR, UNICEF, and the heads of NGO partners exposed a recurrent lack of confidence in OCHA, and a

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common recognition for the need of in-country protection expertise. Though UNHCR is the designated global cluster lead in protection for conflict-generated IDPs, the agency has avoided chairmanship of the Protection Working Group and has yet to meaningfully engage with either protection or IDP concerns in the present crisis. However, UNHCR's new Resident Representative expressed willingness to more fully assume these roles. UNICEF's Country Representative serves as Acting UN Resident Coordinator (standing in for UNDP Resident Representative) and, while meeting with his agency, he agreed with Luu's protection concerns and confirmed that he would push deployment of the ProCap. Ultimately, without Luu's probing this issue with these UN agencies, the officer would have not been deployed. Representatives from UN agencies commonly agreed that OCHA's consistently passive engagement with the GOZ "sent the wrong message" to the wider, very expectant, humanitarian community. As a result of OCHA's weak performance in advocacy, Luu noted that other representative bodies - including Harare's Heads of Missions and Heads of Aid Agencies - were now focusing on alternative multilateral channels by which they might utilize their own collective advocacy, utilizing joint demarches and statements to the GOZ.

16. (SBU) During all discussions with UN agencies and NGO partners, Luu was inquisitive regarding their collective priorities and what was needed to create an enabling environment for the resumption of humanitarian assistance. It was commonly recognized by agencies that, though it was rumored that the NGO suspension would soon be lifted, several conditions must accompany the lifting of the ban. The themes of these discussions culminated in a meeting with all USAID/Zimbabwe's program partners (OFDA, DG, and HIV/AIDS), in addition to the USAID Mission Director and U.S. Ambassador, on the morning of Luu's departure date. This discussion ultimately formed the basis of the July 31 Press Statement by USAID Administrator Fore on Zimbabwe Humanitarian Access - the foundation of which is rooted in humanitarian principles, which have been routinely violated by the GOZ and agents of the state since the March 29 elections. Though NGO partners are hesitant to individually or collectively speak out, largely out of fear of repercussions to their operational status and beneficiaries, they very much appreciated the opportunity to have a strong statement emerge from USAID that was specifically crafted around their concerns.

17. (SBU) The timing of Luu's trip was ideal, as his presence amplified awareness of the humanitarian access issue. The momentum of these recent meetings and discussions prompted Post to create a strategic action plan to push the resumption of humanitarian assistance. Post is committed to undertaking the following tactical actions in support of positive movement on the humanitarian situation:

--Make a joint donor demarche to the GOZ regarding humanitarian access, delivered by Danish Ambassador on July 28;

--Release a demarche letter from Heads of Mission (HOMs) to the public to stimulate pressure from multiple channels (i.e. intra-party power brokers, civil society, and SADC countries).  
COMMENT: The Ambassador has noted that the HOMs are willing to go public with their concerns. It remains to be determined in meetings this week how this will be done. END COMMENT;

--Deliver a second HOMs demarche;

--Urge humanitarian partner organizations to get into the field, attempt program implementation, and push the access issue. They should test the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) commitments to openness, document the reactions, and report their findings (to donors, UN, SADC/AU, and participants/mediators of talks);

--Send a letter from Ambassador McGee to Minister of Social Welfare Nicolas Goche outlining the impact of NGO restriction and holding him personally accountable for denying humanitarian assistance to suffering citizens. Publicize this letter or have the State Press Spokesperson release key points about the letter;

--Urge the ZLHR to submit a class action lawsuit against Minister Goche ("people v. Goche") holding him criminally liable for denying humanitarian access;

--Follow up on the diplomatic note protesting the GOZ theft of 20 MT of USAID food in Manicaland by writing a letter to Minister Goche and including an invoice for the full amount of nearly US\$20,000.

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Deliver invoice and initiate legal action against the Manicaland Governor who personally ordered the theft. COMMENT: Mission requests FFP guidance on how to approach the legalities of recovery.

It is our opinion that addressing the central government would be most effective but Post needs information on how this has been accomplished elsewhere. END COMMENT;

--Have Ambassador McGee host a prayer breakfast in Harare and in Bulawayo with leaders of the interdenominational faith community to encourage humanitarian action by faith-based organizations and churches; and

--Work with civil society and advocacy groups to mobilize the Zimbabwean diaspora to take a more vocal stance on humanitarian access.

18. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: To support these field-based tactics, Post requests that Washington consider taking the following actions:

--Negotiate and release a joint statement by like-minded governments calling on the GOZ to close militia camps, respect humanitarian principles, restore access, protect humanitarian workers, and end harassment of humanitarian organizations. If the GOZ does not respond, we will face an imminent humanitarian emergency, and we hold the ministers and government officials personally liable for criminal acts;

--Call in the Zimbabwean Ambassador to the U.S. to inform him of the call for humanitarian access to be restored and to deliver the invoice for the stolen USG food. Continue pressure on this front if action is not taken to lift the suspension;

--Work with civil society and advocacy groups to mobilize the Zimbabwean diaspora in the region and in the U.S. to take a more vocal stance on humanitarian access;

--Request that InterAction host a half-day conference on the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe to boost interest, action, and advocacy on Zimbabwe by U.S. NGOs. Mission Zimbabwe will similarly advocate with their partners to raise the profile of the situation in Zimbabwe;

--Send an open letter from USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore to heads of humanitarian and development organizations working in Zimbabwe, urging them to do more advocacy and raise public awareness of the GOZ restrictions and policies; and

--Call on UN agencies - and the UN Secretary General - to release statements condemning the GOZ for its restrictions on humanitarian organizations and warning of potential consequences.

¶9. (SBU) The objective of these actions is to create conditions conducive for humanitarian response in Zimbabwe, most notably 1) free access to vulnerable populations for the provision of humanitarian assistance and protection in accordance with internationally accepted standards, and 2) a strengthened and capable network of humanitarian actors that actively engage in coordinated program activities.

¶10. (U) Text of July 31, 2008 Press Statement by USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore is available at:  
[http://www.usaid.gov/press/releases/2008/ps08\\_0731.html](http://www.usaid.gov/press/releases/2008/ps08_0731.html)

¶11. (U) Post will continue providing updates on the implementation and impact of this strategy.

¶12. (U) This cable was cleared by USAID's Director of the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Ky Luu and OFDA/Pretoria.

MCGEE